



March 9, 2015

I appreciate having the opportunity to provide written testimony on Raised Bill 1055, which as I understand it has two parts: To require a position in the Department of Education to work on issues related to the education of gifted and talented students, and to require a Department of Education study of best practices in serving the needs of these students.

Recently, my colleagues and I conducted two national policy studies on high-ability students. In the first, we examined the performance of each state's highest performing students, and we found evidence that in every state there are huge and growing excellence gaps – that is, gaps between high-ability students based on race or family income.

For example, only 1% of Connecticut Grade 4 students who qualify for free/reduced price lunch scored at the advanced level on the NAEP math assessment in 2013, compared to 13% of their higher-income peers. In addition to being a large and growing excellence gap, it is also larger than the gap in many other states. Full details of this report, *Talent on the Sidelines: Excellence Gaps and America's Persistent Talent Underclass*, are available at <http://cepa.uconn.edu/mindthegap>, including a downloadable PDF of Connecticut data.

The second study was funded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, the largest provider of scholarships for low-income, high-ability students in the country. The Foundation asked us to identify and examine key policies and outcomes related to the education of high-ability students. That report will not be released for another week or two, but I am sharing the Connecticut results in this testimony because they directly speak to RB1055.

Regarding policies to promote academic excellence, Connecticut fared poorly, with few state-level policies in place: State policy does not require annual reporting, monitoring, or auditing of services for high-ability students, does not include indicators for the performance of high-ability students in the state K-12 accountability system, does not require identified high-ability students to receive services, is silent on issues related to acceleration, and does not require information on gifted students – let alone low-income gifted students – to be included in coursework for teacher and administrator preparation programs, among other relevant policies.

I am sharing the data from the second study because we also conducted a few case studies that are directly pertinent to RB1055. Only six states received an above-average grade regarding policies to support academically talented students (AL, CO, MN, NC, OH, and TX). In all six of

those states, the people we interviewed identified *the presence of a strong leader in the state department of education as a major factor for their states' success*. Although the presence of this leader was not considered a sufficient condition for the state to successfully address the needs of its high-ability students, it was considered a necessary condition that eventually led to the creation of pro-excellence state policies and effective LEA interventions.

As someone who educated from kindergarten through graduate school in Connecticut, first in Montville then in Storrs, I can speak personally to the benefits of strong programming for high-ability students. But these services are not uniformly available to our K-12 students today. Passing RB1055 is a good first step in the journey to meet the needs of all of our high-ability students, regardless of where they live, the color of their skin, or their families' financial circumstances.

Respectfully submitted,

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